

Hope Forum Addresses Teen Tragedies

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"Every child, every challenge; every day" was the underlying theme of Putnam's first Hope Forum.

More than 250 adults and teenagers gathered at the Lakeview Elementary School auditorium last Thursday evening for the get-together that was co-sponsored by the Mahopac School District and the Town of Carmel.

In recent years, the greater Carmel-Mahopac area has seen it share of tragedies involving the young. From fatal vehicle crashes to a serious boating mishap last summer on Lake Mahopac, teenagers and young adults have been killed while others were maimed for life.

The Hope Forum Steering Committee consisting of Superintendent Thomas Manko, Supervisor Kenneth Schmitt, Val Nierman, Val Trefny, Kristel Halton, Marianna Callaghy, Michael Cazzari, Frank Chibbaro, Janneen Cunningham, Steve DelDuco, Joseph DeMarzo, Daniel Ehrenpreis, Andy Hatt, Chip Kennard, Simone Lind, Adam McKechnie, John Molloy, Damian Morales and Corey Smith along with Jill Talcovitz, the Mahopac Teachers Association, Mahopac Public Library and Carmel Police Department were all lauded for their efforts.

For the past several months, the team has focused its efforts on issues relating to drug and alcohol abuse, high risk behaviors, and the epidemic of DWI arrests reported countywide.

Supervisor Schmitt called on the entire community to become proactive: "We must work together to reduce the carnage on our roads. Too many times young people are exhibiting risky behaviors because parents allow their children to consume alcoholic beverages in their own homes. Such conduct is a recipe for disaster."

Superintendent Manko agreed. He described the partnership between the school and the town as "extremely beneficial. Education must be provided throughout the entire community not just in the classroom. Kids have to learn that they are not indestructible and that tragedies can befall them as every other segment of the population. The Hope Forum gives us new hope that we can stem the tide before another teenager or young adult meets with a calamity."

Two of the most moving moments of the evening came when Talcovitz,

Teenagers by the dozens from schools throughout the area attended the forum.

a Mahopac parent and school nurse at the Mahopac Falls Elementary School, reflected on a "parent's worst nightmare—the night my husband and I received the call that our son Aaron had been fatally injured in a car crash. Aaron was only 19 years old—just two weeks shy of his 20th birthday. His death was devastating. Our lives have been changed forever."

Another parent who lost a child in an auto crash, Scott Wagner of Mahopac, also addressed the gathering. "My son Justin died two years ago on Baldwin Place Road within feet of our high school campus. Justin was only 17. How does a parent go on with his life? My wife and I ask ourselves that question every day."

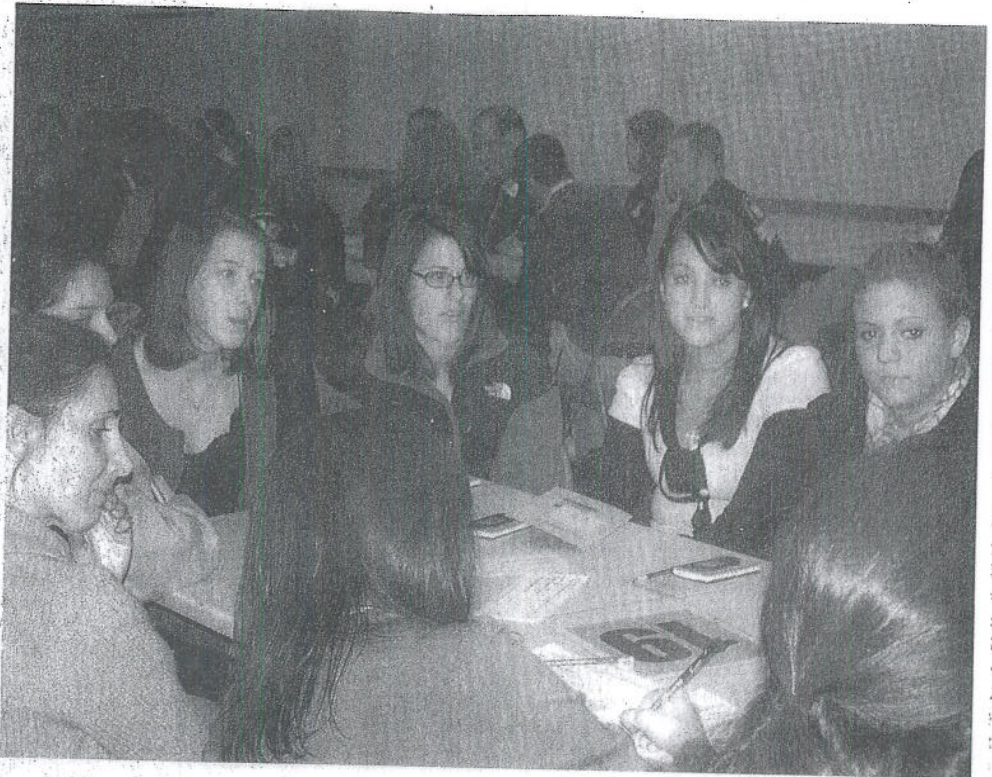
The forum discussed a variety of topics in groups of eight each containing a facilitator. Questions reflected on: "Why do teens engage in risky behaviors? How can the community expand its efforts to prevent young people from engaging in risky behaviors? How do we reach parents and encourage their support?"

The organizers agreed that the Hope Forum would not be the last and with

representatives of school districts that included Brewster, Carmel, Putnam Valley, Somers, and Yorktown as well as governmental agencies on the town and county level, additional forums

will be planned in the next few months.

Last night (Wednesday) the Carmel Town Board began discussions on the creation of a town wide student activity center.



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Putnam County Judge James Reitz (left) leads discussion with Brewster High School Assistant Principal Kieran Stack (second left) during one of the panel discussions.

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